

VZCZCXRO3341
PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHAH #0034 0081118
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081118Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4036
INFO RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6096
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3788
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3647
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4338
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1390
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4272
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000034

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EEB
COMMERCE FOR EHOUSE/DSTARKS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [BBSR](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: OUTDOOR ADVERTISING TIGHTLY CONTROLLED

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Outdoor advertising in Ashgabat is a potentially lucrative sector, but not all advertising companies can break into the closely-guarded market. The Ashgabat municipality functions as the sole proprietor of advertising space in the capital. To date, advertising via posters and billboards is considered relatively inexpensive for larger businesses, but often cost-prohibitive for small to mid-sized businesses. There have been reports that city officials banned "western" images of people appearing on outdoor posters and billboards, and have encouraged companies to use traditional Turkmen images instead. END SUMMARY.

3. (SBU) The Government of Turkmenistan (GOTX) reportedly encourages outdoor advertising largely because Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov wants Turkmenistan's capital to look and feel like a modern, developed city. The Ashgabat mayor's office rents billboards to private advertising agencies, who in turn sell advertising space to companies. Advertising agencies often must have long-standing personal relationships with the Mayor's office in order to rent the billboards. Since city officials hold a monopoly on leasing billboard locations, advertising agencies can be forced to sweeten the pot and corruption is reportedly rampant. If advertising agencies are willing to pay more, they can secure more attractive locations for their client's billboards. Ultimately the costs for outdoor advertising, both legitimate and under the table, are passed on to the clients seeking to place their advertisements.

4. (SBU) There are several advertising agencies in Ashgabat, offering various advertising products. Larger agencies can offer packages which include billboard design, production and placement, leaflets and television commercials. The average cost for renting a billboard for an entire year is approximately \$4,000. Television commercials during prime-time generally run around \$50 per minute.

5. (SBU) Local advertising representatives told us that,

on billboards displaying people, images of people with "western-looking" features (e.g., light eyes and hair) are less likely to get approval than images of people who "look Turkmen." One advertising agency executive told us that the Russian cell phone company MTS was forced to eliminate blond-haired and blue-eyed people from its billboards, replacing them with "Turkmen looking people" dressed in traditional Turkmen clothing, in order to ensure that its billboards were not banned by government censors.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: For large companies with advertising budgets, the hassle and additional costs associated with the corrupt bureaucracy do not deter them from advertising. Most smaller companies, however, are forced to stick to "word of mouth" as their primary method of advertising. END COMMENT

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